

A CAPITAL IDEA!

The Uses and Rules of Capital Letters

CAPITALIZE THIS! . . . *a guide
to the proper care and feeding
of capital letters*

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Capitalize the first word of every sentence — unless that sentence is in parentheses incorporated within another sentence.

Glacial till or debris (some geologists call this material “garbage”) is often deposited in formations called *morains*.

Capitalize the personal pronoun **I**.

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Capitalize the names of family relations when they are used as substitutes for names:

I went to visit my **U**ncle Ted and **A**unt Margaret.

Grandma and **G**randpa live with **D**ad and **M**om now.

I went with **my** mom and dad to visit **my** aunt and uncle.

but . . .

Notice the role of the modifying pronoun here.

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In titles, capitalize the **first, last, and all important words**. Usually, we don't capitalize articles, prepositions, and coordinating conjunctions.

In the **L**ake of the **W**oods

War and **P**eace

I **K**now **T**his **M**uch **I**s **T**rue

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and proper nouns....

Capitalize names of specific persons, places, and geographical locations.

My brother **C**harlie, who used to live in the **M**iddle **E**ast and write books about the **O**ld **W**est, now lives in **H**artford, **C**onnecticut.

Don't capitalize directions.

but

They moved up north, to the southern shore of Lake Erie.

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more on proper nouns....

Capitalize names of days of the week, months, and holidays.

Valentines Day, which is always on February 14, falls on Tuesday this year.

but

Don't capitalize the names of seasons.

Next fall, before the winter storms begin, we're heading south.

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still more on proper nouns....

Capitalize the names of historical events.

The **B**attle of the **B**ulge was an important event in **W**orld **W**ar **I**I.

The **R**eformation took place in the sixteenth century.

Capitalize the names of religions and religious terms.

and

God, **C**hrist, **A**llah, **B**uddha, **C**hristianity,
Christians, **J**udaism, **J**ews, **I**slam, **M**uslims

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still more on proper nouns....

Capitalize the names of nations, nationalities, languages, and words based on such words.

Somalia, Swedish, English muffin, Irish stew,
Japanese maple, Jew's harp, French horn

but

We usually don't capitalize "white" and "black."

There are very few blacks in this predominantly white community.

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even more on proper nouns.....

Capitalize the names of academic courses
when they're used as titles.

He took **C**arpentry 101, but he did much better
in his economics and **E**nglish literature
courses.

and

Brand names

Ford, **K**leenex, **L**evi's (not jeans), xerox on a
Xerox copier, **A**dvil (but aspirin)

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The titles of people and offices....

Capitalize titles when they precede names.

Dean Arrington introduced President Carter to Secretary Bogglesworth.

but . . . usually *not* after a name

Joe Chuckles, who was chairman of the board of directors in 1995, has since retired.

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The titles of people and offices (2)

You can capitalize the names of political entities in in-house publications to avoid confusion.

The **C**ounty and **C**ity have agreed to reimburse the federal government for sewer expenses.

but

You would not capitalize those names in a newspaper report, say.

At the last council meeting, the county agreed to reimburse the federal government.

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The best advice on capitalization:

Consult a good dictionary!

... like the online Merriam-
Webster's:



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